

<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Passives of Possessive (ge)habban in a Passage in AElfric's Catholic Homily I, 33 in the Light of a Recently Discovered Augustinian Source

Kilpio, Matti

2018-06

Kilpio , M 2018 , ' Passives of Possessive (ge)habban in a Passage in AElfric's Catholic Homily I, 33 in the Light of a Recently Discovered Augustinian Source ' , Anglia. , vol. 136 , no. 2 , pp. 269-276 . <https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2018-0030>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/302458>

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2018-0030>

unspecified

publishedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Matti Kilpiö*

Passives of Possessive (*ge*)*habban* in a Passage in Ælfric's Catholic Homily I, 33 in the Light of a Recently Discovered Augustinian Source

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ang-2018-0030>

Abstract: The main focus of this article is on a passage in Ælfric's Catholic Homily I, 33 and its Latin source in Augustine's Sermon 71. The correspondence between the Latin source text and Ælfric's translation is exceptionally close, almost gloss-like. What is particularly striking is the occurrence of passives of possessive (*ge*)*habban* in the Old English, corresponding to passives of possessive *habere* in the source. In both Old English and Latin the expression of possession with the passives of both (*ge*)*habban* and *habere* is very rare. The Latin Trinitarian statement translated by Ælfric consists of three sentences which display a remarkable degree of parallelism at the level of syntax and lexis. This results in a compact statement consisting of parallel repeated elements, which not only establish differences between the three persons of the Godhead but also emphasise the essential unity underlying the Trinity. The article also briefly deals with another, syntactically more relaxed, formulation of the same Trinitarian statement occurring earlier in Augustine's sermon and tentatively asks the question why Ælfric chose the more complex and unwieldy version with passives of *habere* as the base text for his translation.

1 The Ælfrician Passage and its Augustinian Source

While working on the entries for *habban*, *gehabban* and *gehæfd* for the *DOE* I was struck by a syntactically and semantically unusual Old English passage, unusual in the sense that it contains two instances of the passive of possessive (*ge*)*habban* 'have'. Under *DOE* s.v. *habban* I., I draw attention to the rarity of the passive of

*Corresponding author: Matti Kilpiö, University of Helsinki
E-Mail: matti.kilpio@helsinki.fi

possessive *habban* and refer to the passage cited in example (1): in my interpretation it contains the only certain instances of the passive of possessive *habban* or *gehabban* in the *DOEC* database. The passage is given in an abridged form in *DOE* s.v. *gehæfd* 1.; here is the passage in its entirety:

- (1) *ÆCHom* I, 33 463.129: An ælmihtig fæder is se gestrynde ænne sunu of him sylfum: nis se fæder gehæfd gemænelice fæder fram þam suna & þam halgan gaste. for ðan ðe he nis heora begra fæder. And se sunu nis na gemænelice sunu fram þam fæder & þam halgan gaste. for ðan ðe he nis hera begra sunu. Se halga gast soðlice is gemænelice gehæfd fram ðam fæder & þam suna. for þan ðe he is heora begra gast.

‘There is one almighty Father who begot one son out of himself: The Father is not jointly possessed as father by the Son and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the father of them both. And the Son is not jointly a son [emanating] from the Father and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the son of them both. The Holy Spirit is indeed jointly possessed by the Father and the Son, because he is the spirit of them both.’¹

The passage beginning with [...] *nis se fæder* [...] has a very close, almost gloss-like, correspondence to the following passage in Augustine’s Sermon 71.² Unlike the citation in *DOE* s.v. *gehæfd* 1., it is cited here in full:

- (2) *AUG.* Sermon 71.764: Nam pater non communiter habetur pater a filio et spiritu sancto, quia non est pater amborum; et filius non communiter habetur filius a patre et spiritu sancto, quia non est filius amborum; spiritus autem sanctus communiter habetur a patre et filio, quia spiritus est unus amborum.

‘For the Father is not jointly possessed as father by the Son and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the father of them both. And the Son is not jointly possessed as son by the Father and the Holy Spirit, because he is not the son of them both. But the Holy Spirit is jointly possessed by the Father and the Son, because he is the one and the same spirit of them both.’

That a sermon by Augustine turns out to provide the source for the Old English passage cited as example (1) is not surprising: Peter Clemoes draws attention to the importance of Augustine for Ælfric, stating that “Ælfric’s debt to him was for an intellectual framework – for example [...] for the exposition of difficult points of dogma such as the nature of the Trinity” (Clemoes 1966: 185). As my translation of example (2) suggests, I interpret the three instances of *habetur* as passivisa-

¹ The translations of Old English and Latin citations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

² I found the Latin passage by translating part of Ælfric’s Old English into Latin and doing a Google search with my translation. The Old English citations are from *DOEC* (example 1) and *DOE* (example 4); the citations from Augustine’s Sermon 71 from Verbraken (1965).

tions of possessive *habere*. For a detailed analysis of the semantics of (*ge*)*habban* and *habere* in examples (1) and (2), see Section 2.

The syntactic and lexical correspondence between Old English and Latin in these three sentences is striking: the only major difference is that the Latin passive construction which has *filius* as its subject is not translated by an Old English passive; there is no **And se sunu nis na gehæfd gemænlice sunu [...]* and the prepositional phrases *fram þam fæder* and *þam halgan gaste* are consequently not agentive. One could assume that the past participle *gehæfd* might originally have been there but could have accidentally been dropped in the process of transmission. It seems, however, more likely that the Latin exemplar Ælfric had at his disposal lacked the second *habetur*: Verbraken (1965: 102) reports that it is omitted in six of the manuscripts he consulted for his edition.³

2 The Semantics of the Old English and Latin Passives

As the Old English provides such a close imitation of the source text, it is useful to ask the following question: how likely is it that the repeated Latin passive *habetur* is possessive? According to Pinkster, whose data reach up to c. AD 450,

[...] passivization [of *habere*] is difficult or non-existent if the second argument of a two-place verb is not a patient or experiencer and (related to this) if the first argument is not a human agent. [...] Thus *habeo* ‘to have’, in its ‘possessive’ meaning, is rarely found in the passive with a human first argument [...], and not at all with inanimate first arguments. (Pinkster 2015: 239)

The example Pinkster (2015: 240) gives of the rare type of passive described here comes from a passage from Cicero’s *Epistulae ad Familiares*:

³ The manuscripts in question are V^{14–19}, all of them continental versions of the collection *De verbis Domini* (see Verbraken 1965: 64). As to manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon origin, the two containing Sermon 71 are particularly interesting with respect to the possible omission of the second *habetur*. As Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 229, of Exeter provenance (Gneuss and Lapidge 2014: item 559) has been used by Verbraken for his edition, it is evident that it does not show this omission. A search I did in another Anglo-Saxon manuscript, not used in Verbraken’s edition, Canterbury, Cathedral Library and Archives, Lit. A. 8 (St Augustine’s, Canterbury s. xi/xii; Gneuss and Lapidge 2014: item 204), did not show the omission, either.

- (3) Cic. *Fam.* 9.26.2. Sed tamen ne Aristippus quidem ille Socraticus erubuit cum esset obiectum habere eum Laida. 'Habeo (sc. Laidem)' inquit, 'non habeor a Laide.' (Graece hoc melius. Tu, si voles, interpretabere.)

'But, after all, even the Socratic Aristippus himself did not blush when he was taunted with having Lais as his mistress. "I have Lais as my mistress", he said, "I'm not had by her". (It's better in the Greek. Make your own rendering, if you care to.)' [translation by Pinkster]⁴

Returning to the Old English and Latin passives in examples (1) and (2), I wish to restate my opinion as to their semantics: in spite of the rarity or the passivisation of possessive (*ge*)*habban* and *habere*, I take all the instances of *nīs/is gehæfd* and (*non* [...]) *habetur* in these examples to represent possessive constructions involving an interpersonal relationship.

The possessive interpretation offers itself as the natural choice with the final Old English and Latin sentences, which do not have a subject complement in the main clauses: *Se halga gast soðlice is gemænelice gehæfd fram ðam fæder & þam suna, [...]* 'The Holy Spirit is indeed jointly possessed by the Father and the Son [...]' / *spiritus autem sanctus communiter habetur a patre et filio, [...]* 'But the Holy Spirit is jointly possessed by the Father and the Son [...]'.

With the remaining Old English and Latin passives, the situation is more complicated. Each of them occurs in a main clause which has a subject complement: *nīs se fæder gehæfd gemænelice fæder fram þam suna & þam halgan gaste [...]* 'The Father is not possessed as father by the Son and the Holy Spirit [...]' / *Nam pater non communiter habetur pater a filio et spiritu sancto, [...]* 'For the Father is not jointly possessed as father by the Son and the Holy Spirit, [...]' / *et filius non communiter habetur filius a patre et spiritu sancto, [...]* 'And the Son is not jointly possessed as son by the Father and the Holy Spirit, [...]'.

In these clauses it would be just about possible to view the passives as non-possessive and translate them by 'is not regarded as', cf. *OLD* s.v. *habeo* 24 and, for Old English, the closely parallel non-possessive use exemplified by *DOE* s.v. *habban* II.N.2.i.ii., second citation. A non-possessive reading of the type 'is regarded as' would imply that the person of the Godhead functioning as subject in a clause would have a certain status in the opinion of the other two persons. An

⁴ The Latin citation ends with a metatextual comment where Cicero expresses his dissatisfaction with his own translation of the Greek witticism. Shackleton Bailey (2001: 229) gives the following explanation for Cicero's dilemma: "The Latin means literally 'I possess Lais but am not possessed by her'. In the Greek *ekhomai* has a double sense, 'I am possessed by' and 'I cling to'."

interpretation along these lines goes against my intuitions.⁵ I prefer seeing the relationship between the three persons of the Godhead as partly analogous with the interpersonal kinship relationship obtaining between family members as seen in the following example with possessive *habban* in the active voice, cited in the *DOE* in section I.A.6.a.:

- (4) WPol 2.1.2: ealle we habbað ænne heofonlicne fæder and ane gastlice modor, seo is *ecclesia* genamod, [...].

‘we all have one heavenly Father and one spiritual mother, who is called *ecclesia*, [...].’

Neither Thorpe nor Godden interpret the Old English passives as possessive. Thorpe (1844: 498–499) makes a mess of the Ælfrician sentences by omitting part of the text and, as a consequence, makes the corresponding omission in his translation. He freely translates [*n*]is [...] *gehæfd* and *is gehæfd* by ‘is not called’ and ‘is called’. His rendering of the two personal agents introduced by *fram* with Modern English *from* is inexplicable and seems to indicate that he did not quite understand the syntax of the Old English clauses he was translating. In his glossary, Godden (2000: 721, s.v. *habban*) refers to the two passives discussed here and two more in the Second Series as follows: “*beon gehæfd* ‘to be, to be considered to be, to be identified as’”. The two passives in the Second Series, II.18.104 and II.34.61 (Godden 1979: 104 and 289), are non-possessive.

3 Another Augustinian Parallel for the Old English Passage

A detail worth noting, and one pointed out to me by Robert Getz (p.c. 18 August 2016), is that in his commentary on Ælfric’s Catholic Homily I, 33, Godden (2000: 280) takes up another Latin formulation of the Trinitarian statement which is found in the same Sermon 71 as example (2). He tentatively links it up with the Ælfrician passage cited in example (1)⁶, quotes it in part and briefly discusses it.

⁵ According to Thom (2012: 31), Augustine “holds that although the divine Persons are really distinct, each of them is substantially the one God”. This double nature of the Divinity makes it difficult to view the persons, who form a unity, as having opinions concerning each other.

⁶ Godden’s hesitation can be seen in his summary list of sources from Augustine’s sermons (2000: xlix): He suggests, but queries, the possibility of Sermon 71 providing a source for Ælfric’s Catholic Homily I, 33.

According to him, it is “[a] characteristic excursus on the Trinity”. Here is the whole sentence:

- (5) AUG. *Serm.* 71.365: Nostis, carissimi, in illa inuisibili et incorruptibili trinitate, quam fides uera et catholica ecclesia tenet et praedicat, deum patrem non spiritus sancti patrem esse, sed filii; et deum filium non spiritus sancti filium esse, sed patris; deum autem spiritum sanctum non solius patris aut solius filii esse spiritum, sed patris et filii;

‘You know, beloved, that in that indivisible and incorruptible Trinity which the true faith and the Catholic church holds to and preaches, God the Father is not the father of the Holy Spirit but of the Son; and God the Son is not the son of the Holy Spirit, but of the Father; but God the Holy Spirit is not only the spirit of the Father or only the spirit of the Son, but of the Father and the Son.’

This anticipates the Latin passage cited as example (1) at the outset of this article. With its active voice and the three accusative and infinitive constructions, it is syntactically more relaxed and natural.⁷

4 Concluding Remarks

Why did Ælfric decide to translate the passive version of the Trinitarian statement provided by Augustine in Sermon 71 and not the active one? There is no obvious answer but it could well be that he found the tightly packed, even iconic, passive version attractive, although choosing it as the base text involved the risk of producing a slightly unidiomatic translation – a bold solution possibly facilitated by Ælfric’s thorough training in Latin rhetoric (see, e.g., Clemoes 1966: 193, 200 and *passim*).

As already briefly pointed out above, example (2) has a number of repeated elements: the Latin, which serves as a close model for the Ælfrician example (1),

⁷ Interestingly, there is something that could be regarded as a freely paraphrasing Old English translation of the Latin Trinitarian statement quoted in example (5) in another Ælfrician homily. Certain topics discussed in Catholic Homily I, 33 reoccur in Ælfric’s metrical homily *Feria VI in Quarta Ebdomada Quadragesimæ* edited by Pope (1967: 303–332). According to Godden (2000: 276), this homily is later than Catholic Homily I, 33. Pope identifies many echoes from Augustine’s Sermon 71 in an interpolation (ll. 209–291) in the homily he edited. From the point of view of the present study, the most interesting of Pope’s Augustinian citations is one which is identical with example (5) above. Pope proposes it as a source for ll. 228–241 of the interpolation (Pope 1967: 322). – In a comment on Pope’s edition, with no page reference but obviously referring to the Latin-Old English correspondences proposed by Pope, Godden (2000: 276) voices his scepticism concerning Pope’s suggestions.

has three complex sentences, each consisting of a main clause modified by a causal *quia*-clause. The main clauses have personal subjects – the three persons of the Godhead – followed by the adverb (*non*) *communiter*, which modifies the three times repeated passive verb *habetur*. Each occurrence of *habetur* is modified by a personal agent phrase: *a filio et spiritu sancto [...]*, *a patre et spiritu sancto [...]*, *a patre et filio*. The only structural difference between the three main clauses is that – unlike the last of them – the first two display subject complements: *pater* and *filius*. Each *quia*-clause has the same subject as the main clause, and the copula (*non*) *est* linking subject and subject complement: *pater*, *filius* or *spiritus*. The subject complement is modified by the genitive of the pronoun *ambo* in each case.

The threefold repetition of one and the same syntactic pattern in the Latin, supported by lexical repetition, is clearly a rhetorical device chosen in order to make a compact statement which not only establishes differences between the three persons of the Godhead but also strives to emphasise the essential unity underlying the Trinity. It is a statement where doctrine, syntax and lexis meet. Ælfric does stretch the limits of syntactic and semantic acceptability in his native Old English here by using a model where Augustine does exactly the same with his native Latin, but this must be seen as a deliberate decision by both authors.⁸

Works Cited

Digitised Manuscript

Augustine and Pseudo-Augustine. Ninety-One Sermons (eighty-nine from the collection “De uerbis Domini et apostoli”). MS Lit. A. 8 [digitised 12 Aug 2011, last changed 19 Nov. 2012]. Canterbury, Cathedral Library and Archives; see <<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/heritage/archives-library/>>.

Printed Sources

Clemons, Peter. 1966. “Ælfric”. In: Eric Gerald Stanley (ed.). *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*. London: Nelson. 176–209.

⁸ I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Anglia*, Lucia Kornexl and Ursula Lenker, for their insightful and constructive comments. Special thanks go to Robert Getz (DOE) for prompting me to consider the interpretation of the two Ælfrician passives of *habban* in example (1) as possessive.

- Clemons, Peter (ed.). 1997. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series, Text*. EETS SS 17. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- DOE = *Dictionary of Old English in Electronic Form, A–H*. 2016. Ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. Toronto: University of Toronto. <<http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>>.
- DOEC = *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus*. 2009. Ed. Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. Toronto: University of Toronto. <<http://www.doe.utoronto.ca/pages/pub/webcorpus.html>>.
- Gneuss, Helmut and Michael Lapidge (comps.). 2014. *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Godden, Malcolm (ed.). 1979. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series, Text*. EETS SS 5. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Godden, Malcolm. 2000. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*. EETS SS 18. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- OLD = *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. 1992. Ed. P. G. W. Glare. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Pinkster, Harm. 2015. *The Oxford Latin Syntax*. Volume 1: *The Simple Clause*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pope, John C. (ed.). 1967. *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*. Vol. 1. EETS 259. London: Oxford University Press.
- Shackleton Bailey, D. R. (ed. and trans.). 2001. *Cicero: Letters to Friends*. Volume II: *Letters 114–280*. Loeb Classical Library 216. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Thom, Paul. 2012. *The Logic of the Trinity: Augustine to Ockham*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Thorpe, Benjamin. 1844. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*. Vol. 1. London: Printed for the Ælfric Society.
- Verbraken, Pierre-Patrick. 1965. “Le sermon LXXI de saint Augustin sur le blasphème contre le Saint-Esprit”. *Revue Bénédictine* 75: 54–108.